

Innovative Curriculum in ELT: A Pathway for Holistic Learners

Ms. Vanitha Singireddy

M. A. (Eng), M.Phil, (Ph.D), PGDCA

IVQ Diploma in Train the Trainer

Assistant Professor in English

CVR College of Engineering

ABSTRACT

The paper deals with the pedagogical change and curricular innovation required to develop holistic learners. The teacher has to break the barriers of traditional approach and become a facilitator to develop the four language skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. The teacher needs to develop autonomy in the curriculum and go beyond the textbook and be pragmatic in pedagogical approach. My seventeen years of experience in teaching language and communication skills to the undergraduate and professional learners has identified the lacunae in language teaching that is learner autonomy and holistic approach to language. Some of the learners possess fear towards language learning and lack confidence to master it. This is where the teacher becomes a mentor, motivator and facilitator. The teacher has to empathize with the learners and identify the needs of the learner before planning the curriculum and delivering it in the classroom. The teacher shouldn't be the sole speaker hampering the development of the learners but a guide in developing the skills and confidence in the language. For this, there should be more task based sessions involved in the language classroom and also meet the contemporary needs of the learner. English is a global language and thereby the teacher needs to adapt to the multicultural linguistic approach and evolve at holism. Language has to be treated as an art when using creatively and science when defining the nuances of the language. The language teacher should not only be proficient in language but also innovative in customizing curriculum according to the needs of the learner. Thus the paper explores the methods to develop innovative language curriculum to empower the learners.

Curriculum Innovation is a managed process of development whose principal products are teaching materials, methodological skills and pedagogical values that are perceived as new by potential adopters. The Curriculum is viewed as a composite whole including the learner, the teacher, teaching and learning methodologies, anticipated and unanticipated experiences, outputs and outcomes possible within a learning institution. The Curriculum development focuses on determining what knowledge skills, and values students learn in schools, what experiences should be provided to bring about intended learning outcomes and how teaching and learning in schools or educational systems can be planned, measured and evaluated.

The Language Curriculum design is a part of language pedagogy. The essence of the curriculum theory can be understood through the three following basic issues:

- The tendencies and approaches to curriculum design
- The stages of curriculum design
- The principles of curriculum design

The curriculum should be aligned towards holistic language learning where learners are seen as a whole person with body, mind, emotions and spirit. There should be innovative pedagogy in the curriculum where students can be taught according to their intelligences.

In Penman's (2005) the different methods to holistic language learning are identified as:

- Multiple Intelligences
- Diachronic and Synchronic learning experiences
- Interaction and community
- New learning environments

According to Gardner's (1993) Multiple Intelligence theory the learners can be taught according to their intelligences and thereby maximize their learning potential. The teacher can ask the learners to prepare an advertisement with a logo, its features in a chart, a pictorial representation and also enacting it in the form of a skit. This activity is known as ADZAP where one can test most of the intelligences. The students can be shown a film as it is highly motivating, relates to students' lives and provides a source of authentic and varied language. Films communicate cultural values, attitudes and behavior. It is

effective at bringing the outside world into language classroom and providing a stimulating framework for classroom communication and discussion. The students can be asked to narrate a story based on a theme. The students can be given a team building activity where the team's likes and dislikes are identified and the interpersonal skills are explored. An out of box thinking activity to develop creative thinking and language skills can be given by asking the learners to interpret the picture for example, the learners can be given a picture of lotus and ask them to interpret in a different way. There is a great scope for language exposition.

The diachronic nature of learning embraces the previous path and experience of the individual learner and the potential future route the learner will take. The students can be asked to speak about themselves and ask them about future plans as what they see themselves in five to ten years, their strengths and goals. The synchronic learning explores the learning environment in which the learner's find themselves. The learning aids, the internet, learning styles, their current language level and motivation factors etc. The teacher can ask the learner to take a scientific concept and describe it with the help of aids. For example dry cleaning concept where the students can explain the experiment with the aids.

In Interaction and community method one can explore various methods of communicating that is between the teacher and the learner, between learners and between native and non – native speakers. This provides the learners a framework to communicate and design their strategies. The New learning environments help the learners in gathering as much information as possible. For example, Black Board, First Class, WebCT are like virtual classrooms where the learners can gain optimum knowledge.

According to Richards (1990), the different methods that have been incorporated into the language teaching curriculum are:

- Grammar Translation Method (1800-1900)
- Direct Method (1890-1930)
- Structural Method (1930-60)
- Reading Method (1920-1950)
- Audio-lingual Method (1950-1970)
- Situational Method (1950-1970)

- Communicative Approach (1970-Present)

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach resulted from a focus on communication as the organizing principle for teaching and also about the nature of language, goals, objectives and the syllabus in language teaching.

Curriculum design involves teacher-learning process. It promotes not only effective classroom learning but also teacher development. The planning of a curriculum develops effectiveness instead of an unplanned curriculum. The interdependence of product-oriented (skills-based) curriculum and process-oriented approach (task-based or procedural curriculum) are necessary ingredients for language curriculum design.

According to Richards (2001), the major factors involved in curriculum design and development are:

- Needs analysis
- Situation Analysis
- Planning goals and learning outcomes
- Course planning and syllabus design
- Providing for effective teaching
- The role and design of instructional materials
- Approaches to evaluation

Needs Analysis

The language learners need to survive in the contemporary global society has to be analyzed. The needs described in terms of linguistic deficiency is the difference between what a learner can presently do in a language and what he or she should be able to do. The needs analysis helps in finding out what language skills learners need in order to perform a particular role. It helps in determining the communicating abilities, the language acquisition, their attitudes, and their cognitive and academic skills, their cultural, political and personal characteristics. In my teaching experience, I identified that the learners needs vary according to their exposure to the language, their environment, their social status and also their interest. The learners need can also be analyzed through simple process like test,

questionnaire, self ratings, and samples of the learner's writings. Once the learners' needs are established, the teacher awareness to these needs has to be established and the curricular innovation has to be associated with ownership. The teacher should be able to take the responsibility in implementing, sustaining and developing it further into a meaningful version of innovation.

Curriculum design

The curriculum design can be planned on the basis of the needs analysis and it is possible to promote the target proficiency. The course development should involve the criteria about the course rationale, that is the information why the course is required and what teaching and learning is involved in this process. It should keep into consideration of entry and exit level i.e. what is the learner's language ability and what should the learner achieve at the end of the course. Then the course content has to be identified according to the competency needs of the learners.

The syllabus can be formulated according to the various contexts:

- Lexical syllabus: It identifies target vocabulary and syllabus can be simulated according to the needs of the learners
- Functional syllabus: It is organized around communicative functions such as requesting, complaining, suggesting, agreeing etc. The communicative competence of the learners can be developed
- Situational syllabus: It is organized around the language needed for different situations and it gives the learners an advantage to present the language according to the context.
- Topic based syllabus: It is organized around themes and topics. The learner's needs are addressed and it is used in making linguistic form meaningful and also applicable for ESL programs.
- Competency syllabus: This is based on the specification of the competencies the learners are expected to master in relation to specific situations and activities. It is used in social survival and work-oriented programs.

- Task-based syllabus: It is organized around tasks that the learners need to complete in the target language. It helps the learners in developing cognitive and comprehensive capabilities and helps in second language acquisition.
- Integrated syllabus: This reflects the different priorities in teaching than absolute choices.
- Modules: This is a self-contained and independent learning sequence with its own objectives. It gives learners a sense of achievement because objectives are more immediate and specific.

The teacher should be able to focus on the importance of non-verbal communication in the language presentation as it is mandatory for effective communication. The teacher should be a role model to impart curriculum in an effective manner. The language teacher plays a pivotal role in building the personality of a learner. Though there is learner autonomy in certain approaches in curriculum like task-based syllabus, topic based syllabus etc, teacher is a leader and manager. There should be adaptation to the curriculum by teacher's exposure to latest methodologies and facilitate the language learners according to their needs. The traditional approach has to be replaced with the contemporary approaches in ELT as it is the pathway for holistic learners. English being as global language, the language teacher is always faced with many challenges and hence innovative curriculum with holistic language teaching approach is the need of the hour.

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